

Red-tail News

Issue 60 Winter 2025

TFL BUSH ACTION TEAM SUPPORTS HABITAT MAINTENANCE

We were thrilled to host the Trees for Life (TFL) Bush Action Team (BAT) during the week of 19 May. Led by Randall Bates, the group of six volunteers and three staff travelled from Adelaide and got straight to work.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, they replanted 165 paddock bulokes at a property near Bordertown, replacing trees lost from a 2023 planting due to dry conditions. Seedlings were protected by mesh sheep guards which had to be removed and then reinstated following their replacement. Several local SE volunteers also pitched in—thank you!

Thursday was spent near Salt Creek in the Coorong, where the team joined Robbie Andrews (LCLB) to remove corflute guards at a Malleefowl revegetation site.

On Friday, we headed to Comaum NFR in search of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos. Excitement peaked when we spotted a flock of 20 birds within just 10 minutes—an unforgettable first for many.

Huge thanks to the BAT Team for their hard work. We look forward to having them back again next year!

Bronwyn Perryman, Cockies Helping Cockies Project Coordinator, Zoos SA



BAT team out in the field looking for Red-tails
Photo: Bronwyn Perryman

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ZOOS SA TAKE PART IN THE COUNT!

For the second year in a row Zoos South Australia have sent down a small team of staff and volunteers to help with the annual cockie count around Naracoorte. A fantastic way for anyone to get involved and assist the valuable research being done into the birds and the health of some of their valuable food trees, the mighty stringy bark!

Conservation Ecologist at Zoos SA, Paul Kotz says, "It has been so wonderful getting people down to help with the survey these past two years. The country down that way is just stunning! Getting the opportunity to connect our own people with this species and this program has been great. If we are to try and instil the passion to save this bird in others, what better way to do that than to have experienced and contributed to the on groundwork ourselves. For those not able to make it over to see the birds in the wild, you can come over to Adelaide Zoo to meet Spence, a rescue South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo that acts as an ambassador for her species in the free flight show." <https://youtu.be/kt3-eRjs2rs>

Paul Kotz, Conservation ecologist, Zoos SA



DCCEEV VISITS TO VIEW RED-TAIL RECOVERY IN ACTION

On May 7th and 8th the Limestone Coast Landscape Board hosted 3 staff from the Department of Climate Change, Energy the Environment and Water and one staff member from the Threatened Species Commissioner's office to showcase their NHT projects.

Rachel joined LCLB staff to present to the group at Naracoorte Caves National Park, discussing the importance of the work that is happening to protect the species – a rare opportunity to speak directly to the decision makers for NHT funding. The Limestone Coast Landscape Board received fantastic feedback about the visit and how it strengthened the guests understanding of the work being undertaken to protect the species.

Similar visits were held over March and April in both the Wimmera and Glenelg Hopkins regions presenting a fantastic opportunity to discuss recovery actions throughout the range in detail.



DCCEEV visit with the LCLB at Naracoorte Caves National Park.
Photo: Steve Bourne

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTINUES TO SUPPORT RED-TAIL RECOVERY

Community engagement is the backbone of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Program. From passionate volunteers and supportive landholders to curious students and eventgoers, it's the strength of the community that keeps this vital conservation work thriving. Every sighting reported and every effort to protect habitat brings us closer to securing the Red-tail's future—thank you for your continued support!

To keep our Red-tails in the public eye, the team has been busy connecting with communities across the region. Highlights since our last update include strong engagement at the South East Field Days, where SeRtBC recovery team partnered with Trees For Life to host a vibrant marquee. Visitors reported sightings, signed up for the Annual Count, and learned about revegetation and the Cockies Helping Cockies project. Over 400 children visited as part of the Blue Yakka Trail, many taking keyrings with links to our website.

Our mascot Karak—first introduced as the official mascot of the 2006 Commonwealth Games—has been making a comeback, delighting crowds while dancing as part of the "Wozza and The Animals of The Magical Mountains" at the Natimuk Show and surprising children at Naracoorte Library's book launch of *High, High, High up in the Sky* by Elizabeth Crowley. Karak continues to inspire young minds and spread awareness about Red-tail conservation.

A big thank you to all our partners, volunteers and supporters. With an extra special thank you to Evan Roberts for his amazing efforts at the South East Field Days and support for the program overall. Together, we're keeping the Red-tail's future bright!

*Rachel Farran, SERTBC recovery project coordinator,
Birdlife Australia*



Karak and the Animals of the Magical Mountains at the 2025 Natimuk Show.
Photo: R Farran

Karak with Olivia and Ebony
at the South East field days
Photo: R Farran

RED-TAILS SPOTTED FEEDING IN 15-YEAR-OLD REVEGETATION!

In March, bird enthusiast and photographer Jennifer Goldsworthy captured something truly special—up to 30 endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos feeding in a 15-year-old stringybark planting and remnant stringybark trees on the Bank Australia Conservation Reserve! This sighting is a powerful sign that habitat restoration efforts are paying off. Over 400 hectares have been actively revegetated across the reserve to support our iconic cockatoos, which rely exclusively on stringybark and buloke trees for food.

It's a fantastic reminder of the importance of maintaining and expanding critical habitat on the reserve to create habitat for our birds. Together partners Bank Australia, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, and Traditional Owners from the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples, represented by Barengi Gadjin Land Council are working to ensure this landscape remains a living example of science-led conservation.

Jess Gardner, Greening Australia



A family group of SERTBC feeding on seed capsules in 15 yr old desert stringybark.

Photo: Jennifer Goldsworthy

RESPONDING TO EMERGING THREATS

Providing advice to ensure habitat protection is a vital part of the work undertaken by the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team. By contributing to policy development and public consultations, the team ensures the needs of the Red-tails and their habitats are not overlooked in decision-making.

Recently, members of the team submitted responses on behalf of the SeRTBC to key documents, including South Australia's proposed Biodiversity Bill and Victoria's draft renewable energy development handbook. These submissions aim to ensure the protection of Red-tail habitat is considered in emerging legislation and development planning.

In response to growing interest in wind energy, and the potential risks it may pose, the team has also developed a draft position statement on wind farm development within the Red-tail's range. The statement was designed to provide guidelines that safeguard the birds' future while supporting sustainable progress.

Recovery team members at the April 2025 recovery team meeting in Casterton.

Photo R. Farran



FIFTH SEASON OF BIOACOUSTICS MONITORING SHOWS SUCCESSFUL UPTAKE OF SUPPLEMENTARY NESTING PROGRAM

The 2023/24 season marked the fifth year of bioacoustics nest monitoring for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. This ongoing program aims to assess both nest usage and breeding success (i.e. fledging outcomes) across a mix of natural and artificial hollows. By tracking how and where these cockatoos' nest, the program contributes critical knowledge to guide conservation actions, including the strategic placement of artificial nest hollows.

This season, sound recorders were deployed at 120 nest sites, including historical natural hollows and newly installed artificial nests. While two recorders malfunctioned, usable audio was collected daily from 118 sites. The 2023/24 season was notable for a large number of new artificial hollows, many of which were monitored for the first time. Of the 74 newly monitored sites, 14 showed confirmed use by Red-tails—an encouraging sign that artificial hollows are being adopted.

Sound data were analysed using a new semi-automated method combining clustering algorithms with search-and-filter techniques to identify Red-tail vocalisations. This shift allowed for faster processing of a large dataset, although some trade-offs in precision are expected. The approach was still effective in identifying whether a nest was active on any given day.

In total, 33 active nests were identified this season, accounting for 28% of monitored hollows. Among these, 16 nests (48%) either fledged chicks or were likely to have fledged. Five nests were confirmed to have failed, while three others showed signs of potential failure. The outcomes of several nests remained uncertain, typically because the monitoring period ended while the nest was still active.

Encouragingly, 11 of the 14 used artificial hollows produced fledglings, showing promising results for the success of the

artificial hollow program. This supports continued investment in hollow installation as a viable conservation strategy. However, ongoing monitoring will be essential to track longer-term trends and determine the most successful hollow designs and placements.

Of particular interest are ten nests that have been monitored continuously since the first season in 2019/20. Six of these have been used in multiple years, with one nest seeing use every season—an important data point that reflects consistent site fidelity by some breeding pairs. In total, 21 nests have now been used in at least two seasons.

This growing body of data offers valuable insight into Red-tail nesting behaviour, especially in relation to hollow use over time and between different types of hollows. As the dataset continues to grow, future analyses may link nest usage patterns to environmental factors such as food availability, which will help prioritise future conservation efforts.

The success of this program reflects the collaboration of field teams, researchers, and technology specialists, all working to safeguard the future of this iconic and endangered species. A very special thank you goes out to Oliver (Oli) Wardle for his hard work collecting and collating the audio data from the field and Daniella Teixeira for her ongoing commitment to analysing the data and constantly working towards updating and improving analysis methods.

With each season, bioacoustics monitoring is proving to be an increasingly powerful tool in understanding and protecting Red-tail nesting habitat.

Article adapted from the 2023/24 Bioacoustic nest monitoring report written by Daniella Teixeira



A female perched on the top of a recently installed nestbox
Photo: B Perryman

INFORMING RECOVERY PLANNING THROUGH MONITORING, RESEARCH AND FIELDWORK

Summer and autumn are a vital time for conservation efforts focused on the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SERTBC). It's the peak season for fieldwork, when critical data is collected to inform and improve recovery strategies aimed at supporting this endangered species.

Long-term Phenology Monitoring

Since 2007, the team has monitored seed production across ten long-unburnt stringybark sites (six *Eucalyptus baxteri*, four *E. arenacea*). By assessing capsule density in the most recent seed crops, this monitoring helps track the annual productivity of critical food trees across the Red-tail's range. Understanding food availability is vital for evaluating habitat suitability and guiding conservation actions.

Bioacoustics Nest Monitoring

This season, 70 nest sites—both natural and artificial—were monitored using sound recorders, thanks to the support of generous landowners who provide access to their properties. These recordings are being analysed by Daniella Teixeira and Oli Wardle at the University of Queensland. Their findings will help evaluate nesting success and refine the supplementary nesting box program.

Nest Box Maintenance and Checks

A total of 150 nest boxes were checked and maintained this year. Each box is inspected with a pole camera after the breeding season to confirm it's no longer in use and to identify any maintenance issues. This work is carried out by a specialist team, Bronwyn and Adam Perryman, who have an in-depth knowledge of the birds and artificial nesting requirements.



Volunteers conducting seed crop surveys during the 2025 Annual Count

Photo - Tonie Thiel

Sightings and Citizen Science

Sightings continue to be a cornerstone of the program. Reports come through the website, hotline, Birddata app, and informal communication with the team. Each sighting is logged into a database and analysed which contributes to our understanding of movement patterns, habitat use, and flock dynamics, all feeding back into strategic planning.

Annual Count

Held each May since 1996, the Annual Count provides a minimum population estimate and insight into habitat use and most importantly helps to identify the location of large flocks for subsequent counting as part of our annual flock counts. Autumn and winter are ideal for this activity, as Red-tails form large flocks—sometimes up to 500 birds—making it easier to get a minimum population estimate. The count also provides information about habitat use and stringybark health through optional vegetation surveys.

Flock Monitoring

Flock counts are conducted after the Annual Count to assess breeding success. Because females and immature birds look similar (all have barred tail feathers), we count adult males separately. A higher proportion of barred birds suggests greater nesting success in previous seasons.

Together, these field-based efforts provide a strong foundation for guiding and improving our work to protect and recover the Red-tail population.

Rachel Farran and Bronwyn Perryman, Birdlife Australia



At times we get a surprise when checking nestboxes before maintenance. Despite the presence of Krefft's gliders, chewing marks on the poles also indicate this box was likely to have been used by a parrot species.

Photo - R Farran

COCKIES HELPING COCKIES - FINALIST FOR SA ENVIRONMENT AWARD

We're thrilled to congratulate our incredible South Australian landholders, local nurseries, Zoos SA, Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Trees for Life, and BirdLife Australia on being named Finalists for the Working Together SA Environment Award for the Cockies Helping Cockies project! Launched in 2009 and led by Zoos SA since 2012, this inspiring collaboration has seen 535 hectares of habitat revegetated and 650 hectares of remnant stringybark forest protected for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. These vital efforts are helping ensure the long-term survival of this iconic species, with Red-tails now feeding in trees planted just nine years ago—a testament to the project's impact.

With the support of 92 dedicated landholders, over 19,000 stringybark seedlings have been planted across 187 sites, delivering ecological and agricultural benefits including shelter, erosion control, and natural pest management. Despite funding delays in 2024, the team rallied with a peer-to-peer fundraising model that saw 5,000 trees planted across 14 hectares. Future plans aim to revegetate 20 hectares annually through 2028. A special thank you to Bronwyn Perryman and Kerry Gilkes for their tireless coordination of this groundbreaking project since its inception and Vicki-Jo Russell for initiating the project. Congratulations to all involved—this recognition is well deserved!

FOOD AVAILABILITY CONCERNS FOR RED-TAILS

Dry conditions over the past season have had a noticeable impact on stringybark forests across the range of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (RTBC). Summer seed assessments conducted by staff, supported by volunteer surveys, revealed low capsule density scores, a key indicator of food availability. This suggests that habitat productivity is currently very low across much of the RTBC's range. Most surveyed sites are showing signs of drought stress.

A 2019 honours project by George Bradey found that Desert Stringybark seed crops dropped significantly when spring rainfall was low during bud initiation—two years before capsule maturity. This highlights the delayed and lasting effects of dry conditions, experience in this current season, on seed supply.

These findings were supported by a 2019 study by Paul Koch on the drivers of habitat productivity which discovered evidence of an ongoing decline across the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo's range. Comparisons with past studies reveal that habitat productivity in 2019 was significantly lower than levels recorded in the 2003 drought year, with prolonged dry conditions playing a major role.

This year wildfires have also taken a toll, damaging feed habitat across the landscape this summer. Together, fire, drought, and climate stress are creating growing concern around food availability for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo in coming years. This highlights the continuing need for action in restoring the productivity and extent of feed trees in the landscape.

Despite these challenges, there are ways the community can help. reporting Red-tail sightings via www.redtail.com.au, the hotline (1800 062 262), or the Birdata app provides valuable data for highlighting changes in habitat use. Landholders can also play a vital role by protecting and restoring stringybark habitat. Encouragingly, revegetated stringybark can begin producing seed in as little as nine years—demonstrating the powerful impact revegetation has in restoring critical food supplies.

Rachel Farran with input from Dr Paul Koch, SERTBC Recovery Team



The recovery team discussing improvements to stringybark habitat health shown through post weed management monitoring at Drajurk State Forest on the 4th of April 2025. Photo - R Farran



A female SERTBC feeding in Stringybark in Jilpanger State Forest during the Annual Count 2025. Photo - Dave Archer

NEW NEST BOXES GIVE RED-TAILS A HELPING HAND

Lack of suitable nesting hollows is a major factor limiting Red-tail breeding success, so providing artificial alternatives is a key recovery strategy. The Recovery Team has continued its work installing 24 additional nest boxes, and redeploying 1 unused nest box across the Wimmera, Glenelg Hopkins and South-East regions with funding provided through the Australian Governments National Heritage Trust program. By increasing the number of suitable nesting sites in key areas, the team aims to boost breeding opportunities for the endangered SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo by addressing a key limiting factor—lack of nesting hollows.

The new boxes were installed high (8-10m) in live trees using a cherry picker, ensuring consistent placement that aims to mimic natural nesting sites. Each property was carefully selected based on its proximity to key feeding habitat, presence of historical nesting and limited availability of existing hollows.

A big thank you goes to the generous landholders who welcomed us onto their properties, and to Bronwyn and Adam Perryman, and Rocky Konnings for building and installing the new boxes.

The design of the nest boxes was inspired by an innovative design based on successful approaches used in Western Australia for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. The design has been further adapted for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo based on the results of a nestbox trail run in 2018 and other key considerations (ie addition of the outer steel Colourbond flashing to improve insulation). Made from corrugated plastic with steel insulation and an internal ladder, they also feature an open-top—shown in WA to reduce uptake by galahs and corellas.

The effectiveness of the new boxes will be assessed this breeding season using bioacoustics monitoring developed by researcher Dani Teixeira. This technology enables the team to detect Red-tail activity through their distinct vocalisations, providing valuable insights without disturbing the birds.

More nest boxes are planned for installation in 2026 in the Wimmera and South-East SA regions, as part of a broader effort to support the Red-tail's recovery.

Rachel Farran and Bronwyn Perryman, Birdlife Australia

VOLUNTEERS UP, SIGHTINGS DOWN – ANNUAL COUNT SHOWS STRONG COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR FINDING RED-TAILS.

This year's South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SeRtBC) Annual Count drew a record number of volunteers, even as sightings of the elusive Red-tails dropped significantly due to weather conditions on the day. A total of 205 volunteers joined the event, travelling from across Victoria, South Australia, and even New South Wales to support this important citizen science effort.

Across the day, 84 groups searched 92 sites throughout the Red-tail's known range in South East South Australia and South West Victoria. Larger sites were shared between groups to maximise coverage. Support came from a wide range of organisations including DEECA, Deakin University, Zoos SA, the Victorian Mobile Landcare Group, and Casterton Rotary Club, alongside dedicated individuals from local birding and field naturalist groups or further afield.

Several schools joined in too, with environmental leaders from Yahl and Penola Primary Schools organising their own count teams. One family also attended incorporating the count into their home school curriculum. These students are part of the Young Environmental Leadership Program, led by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board.

This year's count began with a heartfelt Welcome to Country by Auntie Cathy Munroe, Gunditjmara elder, at the Casterton training session, which was attended by 16 volunteers.

Survey teams covered more than 3,505 km of stringybark forest and contributed over 395 hours of combined survey time. Despite this incredible effort, sightings were down. Only a quarter of teams recorded any Red-tails, resulting in a final adjusted count of 885 birds—a significant drop from last year's 1,303.

Factors affecting detection included birds being widely dispersed, forming smaller flocks, and afternoon winds making it harder to hear the birds' distinctive calls. Additionally, many flocks were found on private land, which surveyors could

not access. Landholder reports were therefore essential in contributing to the final tally.

A total of 40 sightings were recorded (some repeats) and part of the survey efforts with an additional 11 sightings reported on either side of count day. Despite the birds' usual behaviour of forming large flocks in late autumn/early winter, when the count is held, only two flocks exceeded 80 birds. The largest, a flock of 160 Red-tails, was seen feeding in private stringybark bushland near Murrays State Forest.

Importantly, while the count was lower than the 2015 peak (over 1,500 birds), it likely reflects the birds' wide dispersal and challenging survey conditions rather than a dramatic population drop. Flocks were reported from across the region, including Ozenkadnook, Goroke, Miga Lake, Jilpanger, Wattle Range, Penola, Dergholm, Lucindale, Heywood, and Chetwynd, highlighting the importance of protecting the Red-tail's feeding habitat right across the range.

The much-loved Baileys Rocks campout brought together 19 volunteers to share stories and insights. Special thanks to Pam Whitley, who presented valuable information on Australia's avian flu preparedness and the wildlife health surveillance program run through the University of Melbourne's School of Veterinary Science.

BirdLife Australia and the Red-tail Recovery Team extend their sincere thanks to all who participated, especially those who submitted sightings outside the official count day. A huge thank you to Evan Roberts for his tireless behind-the-scenes efforts, and to count team coordinators Paul Kotz, Ruby Stone, David McKinnon, Peter Copley, Monique Cagliari, Toni Thiel, Mardi McClintock, and Jess Skeer. Your dedication keeps this vital project going.

Rachel Farran, SERTBC Recovery Project Coordinator, Birdlife Australia



A pair of Red-tails captured at Jilpanger by Annual Count volunteer Dave Archer
Photo - Dave Archer



Auntie Cathy Munroe, Gunditjmara elder, gave a moving Welcome to Country at the Annual Count.
Photo - Tonie Thiel

TREES FOR LIFE TREE SCHEME SUBSIDY FOR COCKY RECOVERY

Trees For Life are excited to offer a 50% discount on the cost of seedlings ordered through the 2025 Tree Scheme for landholders with properties within three of Trees For Life's South Australian south eastern zones (SC, SE and SU) to help Red-tails. The discount is available for up to 500 seedlings (10 boxes) with any order that includes at least four boxes of key habitat species for the Cockatoo. This offer is made possible with funds provided by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust, and delivered in partnership with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board and Trees For Life. For more details visit <https://treesforlife.org.au/order-seedlings> or email info@treesforlife.org.au. The offer is available 1 MAY – 31 AUGUST 2025.

DIGITAL NEWSLETTER UPDATE

Thank you to everyone for the amazing response we received to our request for email addresses for those who are happy to receive the newsletter digitally to assist with reducing costs. If you are in a position to receive our newsletters and updates as a digital version, and haven't let us know yet, please contact us either via the website www.redtail.com.au or email redtail@birdlife.org.au with your preferred contact email address. Thank you for your ongoing support.

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Rachel Farran

South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Program Coordinator

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